

Chicago & Western Indiana R.R.:  
Dearborn Station Trainshed  
(Polk Street Station)  
Chicago  
Cook County  
Illinois

HAER No. IL-6

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

Chicago & Western Indiana Railroad:  
Dearborn Station Trainshed  
(Polk Street Station)  
IL-6

Location: 47 West Polk Street, at Dearborn Street,  
Chicago, Cook County, Illinois

Date of Erection: 1883-85

Present Owner: Chicago & Western Indiana Railroad  
47 West Polk Street  
Chicago  
Illinois

Present Use: Demolished, May 1976

Significance: The Dearborn Station Trainshed of the Chicago & Western Indiana Railroad was an unusual and unique example of trainshed design, combining timber and wrought iron in the massive trusses that supported the roof. It was possibly the oldest structure of its kind in the United States at the time of its destruction.

The trainshed was constructed during 1883-84, and completed for use in October of 1885. It was designed to shelter ten tracks, running north-south, in pairs with low platforms between. The trainshed covered the area south of the main station, between the east and west wings. This included an open concourse about 135 feet long by 30 feet wide, separated by an ornamental iron fence and gates from the boarding platforms and tracks. The timber shed itself measured about 165 feet wide and about 700 feet long. It included timber and wrought iron rod trusses on 16 foot centers with a louvered monitor at the top. The main truss span was about 65 feet, supported on steel columns. Sloping shed roofs were attached on each side to cover the remaining tracks on the east and west.

In 1920 the open concourse was enclosed and heated to increase waiting room space. In 1924 the station tracks and platforms were lengthened and covered with steel trusses from which were suspended steel canopies to the south of the old trainshed. The old concourse was removed and a new waiting room constructed between the east and west wings. To the south of this waiting room was constructed a new enclosed and heated concourse.

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Dearborn Station  
Trainshed  
HAER No. IL-6 (page 2)

A need to accommodate increased mail service resulted in the construction of a supplementary trainshed in 1930. Four additional north-south tracks with concrete platforms were covered with a flat roofed steel and concrete trainshed 100 feet wide by 350 feet long.

The trainshed became the focus of a bitter fight between preservationists and developers in 1973, when the plans for a 60,000 resident "New Town" were announced for a site bordering the Dearborn Station. The C&WI Railroad and the developers sought to clear the site for new construction related to the development project. The preservationists sought to promote the adaptive reuse of the extant structure. After a three year dispute, which included court action, the station headhouse was saved, but the trainshed was demolished in May of 1976. The proposed "New Town" project was never initiated.

References:

Hugel, G. C.; "Historical Sketch of Dearborn Station," Railway & Locomotive Historical Society Bulletin, No. 47, September 1938.

Westfall, Carroll W.; "Historic Chicago Train Shed Destroyed," Press Release, Chicago Landmarks Preservation Council, May 28, 1976.

Transmitted by: Kevin Murphy, Historian HAER, June 1984.